

Evacuations expand in Oregon as fire spreads erratically

July 16 2021, by Gillian Flaccus and Adam Beam



In this photo provided by the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshall, flames and smoke rise from the Bootleg fire in southern Oregon on Wednesday, July 14, 2021. The largest fire in the U.S. on Wednesday was burning in southern Oregon, to the northeast of the wildfire that ravaged a tribal community less than a year ago. The lightning-caused Bootleg fire was encroaching on the traditional territory of the Klamath Tribes, which still have treaty rights to hunt and fish on the land, and sending huge, churning plumes of smoke into the sky visible for miles. Credit: John Hendricks/Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal via AP

More people living along the eastern edge of an Oregon wildfire were told to evacuate late Thursday as the inferno began spreading rapidly and erratically in hot afternoon winds and threatened to merge with a nearby, smaller fire that had also exploded in size.

The Bootleg Fire, the largest wildfire currently burning in the U.S., has now torched an area larger than New York City and has stymied firefighters with erratic winds and extremely dangerous fire behavior. The fire, pushed by winds from the south, has the potential to move 4 miles (6 kilometers) or more in an afternoon and there is concern it could merge with the smaller, yet still explosive Log Fire, said Rob Allen, incident commander for the blaze.

The Log Fire started on Monday as three smaller fires but exploded to nearly 5,000 acres (2,000 hectares) in 24 hours. It is also being fanned by winds from the south, Allen said.

Firefighters were all pulled back to safe areas due to intense fire behavior and were scouting ahead of the main blaze for areas where they could make a stand by carving out fire lines to stop the inferno's advance, he said.

Crews are watching the fire, nearby campgrounds "and any place out in front of us to make sure the public's out of the way," Allen said. He said evacuation orders are still being assessed.



An air tanker drops fire retardant to battle the Dixie Fire in the Feather River Canyon in Plumas County, Calif., Wednesday, July 14, 2021. Residents were warned to be ready to evacuate as a growing wildfire bears down on two remote Northern California communities near a town largely destroyed by a deadly blaze three years ago. The fire that broke out Tuesday afternoon has chewed through more than 1.8 square miles (4.8 square kilometers) of brush and timber near the Feather River Canyon area of Butte County. Credit: Paul Kitagaki Jr./The Sacramento Bee via AP

The main fire has destroyed 21 homes in an area north of the Oregon-California border that has been gripped by extreme drought. It was 7% contained as of Thursday, when authorities decided to expand previous evacuation orders near Summer Lake and Paisley. Both towns are located in Lake County, a remote area of lakes and wildlife refuges with

a total population of about 8,000.

"We're trying to determine where is it moving, how far and how fast, to determine what to do with evacuation levels," said Gert Zoutendijk, spokesman for the Oregon office of the State Fire Marshal. "The big word is for everyone in Lake County to be aware and start getting signed up for the alert system if they have not already."

On Wednesday, the Bootleg Fire generated enormous smoke columns that could be seen for miles—a sign that the blaze is so intense it is creating its own weather, with erratic winds and the potential for fire-generated lightning.



Firefighter Garrett Suza, with the Chiloquin Forest Service, mops up a hot spot on the North East side of the Bootleg Fire, Wednesday, July 14, 2021, near

Sprague River, Ore. Credit: AP Photo/Nathan Howard

Meanwhile, a fire near the northern California town of Paradise, which burned in a horrific 2018 wildfire, caused jitters among homeowners who were just starting to return to normal after surviving the deadliest blaze in U.S. history.

Chuck Dee and his wife, Janie, returned last year to Paradise on the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada to rebuild a home lost in that fire. So when they woke up Thursday and saw smoke from the new Dixie Fire, it was frightening, even though it was burning away from populated areas.

"It made my wife and I both nervous," he told The Associated Press in a telephone interview.

The Dixie Fire was tiny when it began on Tuesday, but by Thursday morning it had burned 3.5 square miles (9 square kilometers) of brush and timber near the Feather River Canyon area of Butte County northeast of Paradise. It also moved into national forest land in neighboring Plumas County.



Helicopters drop water to battle the Dixie Fire on Highway 70 in the Feather River Canyon on Wednesday, July 14, 2021, in Plumas County, Calif. A California blaze that erupted near the flashpoint of the deadliest wildfire in recent U.S. history is heading away from homes but survivors of the 2018 blaze in the town of Paradise are worried that history could repeat itself. The Dixie Fire is burning in California's Butte and Plumas counties, not far from where the 2018 conflagration killed 85 people. Credit: Paul Kitagaki Jr./The Sacramento Bee via AP

There was zero containment and officials kept in place a warning for residents of the tiny communities of Pulga and east Concow to be ready to leave.

The Dixie Fire is part of a siege of conflagrations across the West. There

were 71 active large fires and complexes of multiple fires that have burned nearly 1,553 square miles (4,022 square kilometers) in the U.S., mostly in Western states, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

Extremely dry conditions and [heat waves](#) tied to [climate change](#) have swept the region, making wildfires harder to fight. Climate change has made the American West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

In the Pacific Northwest, firefighters say they are facing conditions more typical of late summer or fall than early July.



Firefighter Jacob Walsh examines burned trees on the North East side of the Bootleg Fire, Wednesday, July 14, 2021, near Sprague River, Ore. Credit: AP Photo/Nathan Howard

A wildfire threatening more than 1,500 homes near Wenatchee, Washington, grew to 14 square miles (36 square kilometers) by Thursday morning and was about 10% contained, the Washington state Department of Natural Resources said.

About 200 firefighters were battling the Red Apple Fire near the north-central Washington city renowned for its apples. The fire was also threatening apple orchards and an electrical substation, but no structures have been lost, officials said.

In Paradise, California, about 80 miles (129 kilometers) north of Sacramento, residents are focused on rebuilding. So far, 1,642 building permits have been issued with 923 homes completed, according to the city's website. The skyrocketing cost of lumber has complicated some projects, but Chuck Dee said he was fortunate to get his bid in place before the prices rose.



A road sign is seen charred on the North East side of the Bootleg Fire, Wednesday, July 14, 2021, near Sprague River, Ore. Credit: AP Photo/Nathan Howard



Oregon National Guardsmen regroup at the Bootleg Fire Command Center, Wednesday, July 14, 2021, in Chiloquin, Ore. Credit: AP Photo/Nathan Howard



A hotspot flares up on the North East side of the Bootleg Fire, Wednesday, July 14, 2021, near Sprague River, Ore. Credit: AP Photo/Nathan Howard



Firefighter Garrett Suza, with the Chiloquin Forest Service, mops up a hot spot on the North East side of the Bootleg Fire, Wednesday, July 14, 2021, near Sprague River, Ore. Credit: AP Photo/Nathan Howard



Dee McCarley hugs her cat Bunny, whom she took with her while evacuating from the Bootleg Fire, while at a Red Cross center on Wednesday, July 14, 2021 in Klamath Falls, Ore. Credit: AP Photo/Nathan Howard



Firefighter Gary Robinson, with Pacific Habitat and Fire, eats dinner by headlamp after a 12-hour shift fighting the Bootleg Fire, late Tuesday, July 13, 2021, in Bly, Ore. Credit: AP Photo/Nathan Howard



Tim McCarley talks about their evacuation from the Bootleg Fire while at a Red Cross center on Wednesday, July 14, 2021 in Klamath Falls, Ore. Credit: AP Photo/Nathan Howard

The Dees' rebuilt house is a little smaller than the original one, and with a different floor plan—and this one was constructed with [fire](#) retardant siding. A local law also prohibits wooden fences from touching the houses.

The couple hope to move in once they get their utilities hooked up. In the meantime, they're living in an RV. They said they don't regret moving back, having accepted that fires will be part of life in this part of California.

"We can't wait to get back in this house and get started," Chuck Dee said.

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